

VZCZCXR06873

PP RUEHBC RUEHKUK RUEHMOS

DE RUEHLB #0438 0451654

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 141654Z FEB 06

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2006

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 000438

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2016

TAGS: IS LE PGOV PREL PTER SY

SUBJECT: MGLE01: FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF HIZBALLAH RAISES HIS PROFILE

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

-----

¶1. (C) Shia extremist Sheikh Subhi Tufayli, who led Hizballah for two years before being forced from the leadership in 1989, and then expelled from the party in 1998, is gradually re-emerging from the shadows. During last week's Ashoura rally in his hometown of Brital, located near Baalbek, Tufayli openly addressed the crowds, despite a current arrest warrant issued against him for treason, dating from his participation in a violent confrontation with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in 1998. Tufayli, who in the past has stridently called for "martyrdom" operations against Israeli and U.S. interests, is attracting increasing attention from the Shia community in the surrounding Biqa Valley. He is an avowed opponent of Hizballah's current leader, Hassan Nasrallah, and attacks his successor at every opportunity. Tufayli attempted to defy both Hizballah and the GOL in 1997 when he called for a "revolt of the hungry" among Shia farmers in Lebanon. The "revolt" ended in an armed clash between Tufayli's followers and the LAF. Since that clash Tufayli has remained a quiet figure in Shia politics. His re-surfacing, although barely noticed by most political analysts, bears watching due to his past prominence and opposition to both Nasrallah and to the GOL. End summary.

¶2. (C) During an Ashoura rally on February 9, Sheikh Subhi Tufayli, Hizballah's former Secretary General from 1987-1989, emerged from self-imposed silence with a speech to the large crowd. An avowed radical, who criticized the organization's current leadership for timidity and being "too pro-Christian," appears to be regaining a measure of support and attention in the near monolithic Shia community. Following his Ashoura speech, in an interview given on February 12, Tufayli unexpectedly called on Hizballah to abandon its arms, to prevent, he argued, other communities in Lebanon from resorting to re-arming in the face of increased sectarian tension.

¶3. (C) Tufayli's troubles with the authorities continue, despite the apparent reluctance of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces to arrest him in his home town. When the Sheikh was expelled from Hizballah in 1989, Tufayli and his supporters attempted to seize control of a Hizballah-run school in Ayn Burday, located on the outskirts of Baalbek. The situation deteriorated badly and during a fire fight, reportedly eight persons died, including an LAF officer. Charges including treason and murder were filed and are still outstanding, compelling Tufayli to remain close to his power base in Brital.

COMMENT

-----

¶5. (C) Tufayli's call for disarmament seems to be a positive development for inter-communal relations, but his past positions suggest that he may not yet have abandoned the radical bent of his other views. Despite having greater visibility in the past few weeks, Tufayli has not renounced his earlier calls for martyrdom as a military tactic, and his past criticism of Islamic scholars who condemn suicide attacks. In the past, Tufayli has praised the actions of the 9/11 terrorists, as well as the extremists responsible for the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, once declaring, "I wish I had had the honor to bomb it." End comment.

FELTMAN